

The Freedom of Forgiveness

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

The uneasiness in your spirit just won't go away. It is there, day after day, nagging, toiling, and waking you up at night. *What can this be?* You wonder. But deep in your heart you are intimately familiar with the pain you carry and the scars left behind by the piercing blade of unforgiveness.

Although the Bible tells us that an unforgiving spirit can lead to a root of bitterness ([Heb. 12:15](#)), we often make subconscious choices to withhold forgiveness. These decisions generally stem from negative thoughts about the person whom we are unable to forgive; thoughts that seem impossible to relinquish because they have become routine and perhaps part of our identity.

Still, considering the pain that accompanies the inability to forgive, why do we cling to this draining emotion? Surprisingly, many of our motives originate in self-centered desires.

Why Don't We Forgive?

* **We want to place blame.** In order to forgive, we feel we must first assign all charges of wrongdoing to someone else. The real danger, however, occurs when the blame is placed upon God. When we develop a pattern of accusing God of causing our pain instead of allowing it, we temporarily close the door on our spiritual growth. It is important to understand that we live in a sinful world in which sinful acts take place. Though our faith will be **tested** ([James 1:3](#)), God's actions toward us are never malicious.

* **We want perfect resolution.** Forgiveness is often withheld because of an imaginary "script" we create in our minds. This script centers on the way in which we think our offender should behave following his or her transgression against us. For instance, we may envision receiving a public apology, monetary compensation, or physical restitution. We then refuse to forgive until these events happen our way in our timing.

* **We want acknowledgement of our innocence.** A common thread runs through cases of betrayal or physical wrongs such as extramarital affairs and abuse. While we outwardly refuse to communicate forgiveness to our offenders, we may inwardly long to be recognized by them as whole, complete, and blameless.

* **We want to protect ourselves from further pain.** Granting forgiveness, in many people's minds, is equivalent to saying, "I approve of what was done to me." But on the contrary, God makes it clear that forgiveness does not involve condoning a person's actions. ([Luke 23:34](#))

This point leads directly to a vital decision, which is the key to forgiveness: in order to forgive, we must place our trust in the promises God has given us.

What Does God Promise to Those Who Forgive?

* **To heal our wounds.** God promises to bring healing to those who suffer. "**After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you**" ([1 Peter 5:10](#)).

* **To take up our burdens and our grievances.** Scripture tells us that it is not our responsibility to take revenge. Instead we are called to trust God to pronounce judgment. [Romans 12:19](#), admonishes: "**Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.**"

* **To restore our joy.** [Psalm 30:5](#) assures that "**Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.**" This joy can be achieved only with God's help.

* **To honor our obedience.** [Mark 11:25](#) says, "**Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.**" If we have truly repented of our own sins and allowed God's forgiveness to permeate us, it will be difficult to harbor unforgiveness against someone else. When we are ready to let go, God is waiting to help us.

The Life of Forgiveness

In *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, author Donald S. Whitney explains that the ability to forgive quickly is an important attribute of the mature Christian's life. "A forgiving spirit characterizes those who have been forgiven," he says. "Repenters toward God are forgivers toward others. Those who find themselves unable to forgive reveal that they've never experienced the transforming forgiveness of God." Essentially, despite being born again, many of us have not truly embraced the fact that our sins are not remembered by God.

When we choose to make forgiveness a part of our lives, it will accomplish more than a release from the bondage of negativity. Forgiveness will bring peace, allowing us to experience greater intimacy with God. In addition, when the burden of unforgiveness is removed, we will notice a decrease in selfishness and a diminished urge to change others.

Are you holding tightly to the "security" of unforgiveness? Do not be deceived by the false sense of control that you may feel. Instead, allow God's healing hands to embrace you today. He can remove the deepest roots of bitterness and heal your broken heart.